Ekanatha Swami.

I

Ekanatha was the disciple of Janardana Pundit, a great worshipper of God Battatreya. He served his guru so faithfully that he was greatly pleased at his behaviour and put him in charge of his Mutt-accounts. One night, Ekanatha had to keep awake very late as he could not account for an expenditure of a few pice. Finding him completely absorbed in his accounts, his guru came near and said:

"Ekanatha, if you bestow half of this thought on Lord Krishna, He will make you supremely happy."

Ekanatha at once got up and fell at his guru's feet. The sage taught him the Divine Taraka Mantra and made Dattatreya appear before him, and blessed him with the gift of singing songs in glory of the Lord.

II

One day, Lord Panduranga came in the guise of a poor Brahmin youth and offered to become his servant if he would only provide him with food every day. Ekanatha gladly engaged him as a water-carrier, and Kandayya, for that was the servant's name, made himself useful to his master in every way. For full twelve years the Lord drudged in Ekanatha's house like this, and Ekanatha had no means of finding out who he was.

On a Shraddha day Ekanatha asked his wife to prepare a feast. He was sitting outside studying a book. Just then a Pariah street-sweeper and his wife came along. They stopped before his house and enjoyed the smell of the sweet-meats coming from within. "But what is the use?" said they to themselves. "We are outcasts, and there is no hope of our tasting any of these things."

On hearing these words, Ekanatha's heart was deeply moved. He at once took out all the good things prepared for the occasion and gave them away to the Pariah couple who ate them with great relish.

But the Brahmins of the place who had been invited to represent his Pitris were furious and would not come to his house. For had he not dared to feed an outcaste that very morning?

Ekanatha and his wife did not know what to do. Just then Kandayya came and said:

"Sir, if the Brahmins won't come, why should you not ask the Pitris themselves to come in person and receive the food-offering? They will surely respond to your call."

Ekanatha at once prayed to the Pitri-Devas and Lo! they all stood before him as holy Brahmins! Ekanatha fed them sumptiously and they took their departure along the streets praising his piety and largeness of heart. The Brahmins of the place felt abashed and implored pardon.

III

Next day, as he was bathing in the river Ganges, a leper came and cried:"I have been suffering from this feel disease for a long time. One night I had a dream that my disease would disappear if you agree to give me the merit of you having fed a Pariah on a Shraddha day. Please have mercy on me and save me." Ekanatha replied: "Oh Brahmin, I willingly make over that merit to you and pray to the Lord that you may be cured." The leper bathed in the river and came out completely cured.

IV

A Panchama and his wife used to listen to his discourses and holy songs from a distance. One night, when all the people had gone, Ekanatha called the couple to his side and asked who they were. With tears flowing down his cheeks the man said that he was a low born Pulaya but his love towards the Lord was the cause of his presence there. Ekanatha's heart was moved and blessing the couple he

asked them what they wanted. The Pulaya's wife said: "Oh, Holy Sir, if you bu deign to come to our hut and partake of our feed, we shall become blessed. But I dare not ask you such a great favour." "You are greater beings than my humble self" replied Ekanatha. "I shall gladly come and eat out of your hands."

Next day, the man had a rich meal prepared in his hut and came to fetch the sage. Ekanatha, on seeing him, rose up and followed him. But the neighbours blocked his way and prevented him from going. Ekanatha insisted upon going but they all forced him back into his house. "Oh Lord Krishna", cried Ekanatha, "the poor man will be disappointed. These people know not what they do. In Thine eyes none is too low to receive Thy grace. O, help him, Lord, or he will die of broken heart."

The poor Panchama returned home with a heavy heart and told his wife of what had happened; cursing their hard lot, they were about to throw away in disgust all the good things they had prepared for the saint's dinner. Wonder of wonders! Ekanatha stood before them, smiling. They fell at his feet and took him within. Ekanatha ate to his heart's content and blessed his host. Just as he was coming out of the hut, some Brahmins noticed him and told other Brahmins of Ekanatha's foul deed. Some of these went to Ekanatha's house to demand an explanation of him for his conduct. But to their great surprise, they found him sitting there, talking with some people. These latter told them that Ekanatha had not stirred out at all on that day. The Brahmins now realised that God must have gone to the Pariah's hut in the form of Ekanatha. They felt humbled and repented for their cruelty to him.

V

A pious Brahmin of Dwaraka used to go to the temple of Sri Krishna there and offer his worship with great devotion. One night, Rukmani Devi appeared to him in a vision and said: "The Lord is not in the temple at Dwaraka. He is serving in Saint Akanatha's house as a menial under the name of Kandayya. Go forth and bring Him hither."

The man woke up and hastened to Ekanatha's house in a far off village. Ekanatha received him kindly and asked him about the purpose of his visit. With tears streaming in his eyes the man told Ekanatha of his dream and said that Kandayya was but the Lord in disguise. Ekanatha felt a thrill pass through his veins. He ran out and went in search of Kandayya everywhere. But Kandayya was not to be found anywhere. He broke out in great grief: "Oh, Lord, is it Thou that servest me so? Ah, how many times have I exacted work from Thee. Wretch that I am! Where is hope for me! Ah, Lord, unless Thou come before me and say that Thou hast forgiven me, I can live no longer." With these words he fell down senseless.

Kandayya came in running and lifted him up. As Ekanatha came to his senses, the Lord stood in all His Glory and said: "Ekanatha, grieve not for Me. I always take delight in serving My devotees. Think not that you have sinned. You are My chosen devotee. I feel sorry to be away from you, but I shall be always with you in some form or other." So saying, the Lord vanished.

Choka-mela

I

Birth and early life.

One of the noblest of Vittoba's worshippers was Choka-mela, the subject of this story. His parents were Sudama and Mukta-Bai who lived at Anagod near Pandharpur. In order to obtain offspring, Sudama made many pilgrimages to Pandharpur and constantly prayed to Vittoba to bless them with children.

One day, in the absence of her husband Sudama, it fell to Mukta-bai to convey mangoes from the Mahar lands to the Musalman governor of Bedar. On the way she saw a starving Brahmin who asked her for some mangoes. Mukta-Bai gave him some fine mangoes which he ate with great relish. He then blessed her and said: "You shall have fine children; call the eldest 'Choka', because I have sucked the Mangoes." With these words he disappeared.

In due course a son was born, and he was given the name of Choka-mela. He grew up to be a saintly boy under the pious and fostering care of his parents.

One day it so happened that he was the only Mahar present at Anagod. He was ordered to drag away the body of a large cow that had just died. The task was too hard for Choka for he was but a mere boy. But Vittoba came to his help, and so the task was performed. When the work was finished, a high-born maiden who had been blessed with the vision of the Lord, fell at Choka-mela's feet and begged him to accept her as his bride.

Soon Choka-mela left his home at Anagod and took up his residence at Pandharpur in order to be nearer to his God. As a Mahar, he could not enter the temple. But he prayed constantly to Vittoba from the outer gate. Denied the privilege of the Holy sight, he took on himself the humbler duty of sweeping the street and pathways around the temple, and passed his days in meditation and prayer. The thought however, of a Mahar Saint was too much for the bigoted people of the place; and so he was persecuted.

II

Persecution and Banishment.

One day, when Choka-mela was worshipping Vittoba from the outer gate, a Brahmin scoffed at him and said: "Tell me what good are alle your prayers; you worship Vishnu day and night, yet you may not venture into His Holy Sight. It is as impossible for you to enter Vishnu's Heaven as for a beggar to win a throne."

Choka-mela looked at him and humbly replied: "The sun, though unnumbered miles away, still sheds its rays on the lotus. So too the Lord of Heaven may yet look on me and listen to my prayers. From afar He sees and shrinks not from the low. But if He finds no temple in thy mind, though thou mayest be close to the shrine, thou art still far apart."

That night, as if to prove the truth of Choka-mela's words, Vittoba Himself came to the humble cottage of the saint and bore him swiftly to His temple-hall, and taking the saint's hand in His told him that his was the worship that gave him the greatest pleasure.

A temple-priest who slept outside, awoke and, calling to the other priest, said: "See, Choka-mela sits in the shrine with Vishnu's Avatar. God is defiled. Fled is the faith and fouled the Brahmin's creed." They were horrified at the sacrilege and at once seized Choka-mela, and dragging him through the door, cried: "Now get you hence!" But Choka-mela softly smiled and said: "Now, if a Mahar should bathe in the Ganges, will his pollution abide in her stream? Can my touch defile the ever-pure and the ever-perfect God? You do not speak like wise men!"

The haughty priests got angry. The thought of the Mahar preaching sermons to them, the twice-born, was too much for them. They met together and sent a complaint to the king. The latter sent for Choka-mela and asked him how he, a low born fellow, dared to enter the temple. To this Choka-mela humbly made answer:

I

Birth and early life.

II

Persecution and Banishment.

"Sire, God taketh me inside by force. What shall I do?"
The king did not listen and ordered him to be tied to a yoke and dragged along the streets. After punishing him thus, the king banished him from Pandharpur.

III

Eventual Triumph

One day, as he dined beneath a lime-tree's shade, the dark God (Krishna) joined him, attired in His Divine robes. Choka-mela's wife brought curds and served them to the God; but as she served, some bit of curds splashed on Vittoba's robes. The saint rebuked her and said: "Is it thus you treat the Lord when He comes to dine?"
A Brahmin priest heard these words, as he passed along the road. He thought that the Mahar had blasphemed the absent God. Pushing forward in fury, he smote down the saint with his fist. Then he bathed in the river to wash his stain and walked proudly to Vittoba's temple. And lo! what did he behold there? He saw the stain of curd on God's pitambar. His cheek was swollen and tear-drops flowed from His eyes.
The Brahmin saw and was filled with fear. Cursing himself for having struck him whom God loved best, he ran to the saint and begged pardon. He requested the saint to follow him to the shrine. Soon they reached the temple. And lo, when the saint made his appearance, the hurt cheek healed, and there spread a smile over Vittoba's face.

=S a i n t P a t h i n a t h a r=

Pathinathar was a merchant prince who had his argosies plying between the peninsula and the island of Lanka (Ceylon). Once upon a time he was feeling sad as his merchantmen did not return home in time. When the news of their safe arrival reached him, he hastened with joy to the port to see them. During his absence a Sannyasi called at his house for alms, but the mistress of the house asked him to wait for her husband's return. The mendicant monk was incensed at that, and gave her an eyeless needle and a leaf with these words written on it:

"Ill-gotten gains nor buried treasure vast
nor eyeless needle go with us at last."

The good dame, not knowing the contents, handed them to her beloved husband on his return; and when he read the words and opened the parcel, his latent spirituality burst forth and a hatred for things temporal sprung up with it.

He gave away all his wealth to the poor and the needy and renounced the world. He went begging from door to door and had no sense of me and mine. His sister, to whom his mendicant life was intolerable, forgot all her love for him under the heartless tyranny of senseless public opinion, and gave him a poisened cake to eat.

The saint saw through it and left the cake in the eaves of her house. The house was in flame at once, and the good lady was smitten with remorse and struck with the sanctity of her brother's person.

T h a y u m a n a v a r

In times of old there lived in the city of Trichinopoly a Chetti girl. She was the only daughter of a pious woman who lived in a village far away on the other side of the Cannery. She was given in marriage to a cast man who was a petty trader in the City. The mother often used to visit her daughter, and after staying with her for a few days would return home to her village. In course of time the daughter became big with child.

As days passed on, the mother got news that her daughter's confinement was close at hand. The woman at once started for Trichinopoly. She came as far as the bank of the Cannery and found the river in high flood. There were no bridges, no ferry-boats. The woman was at a loss to know what to do. She wrung her hands in despair and cried to the Lord:

"O Lord, there is none to attend upon my daughter at the time of her travail. I cannot be near her at this time. I entrust my poor child to Thy hands. I have heard that Thau art the Friend of the poor and the helpless."

Praying thus, the woman resigned herself to the inevitable and stood on the bank, waiting for the flood to subside.

The All-merciful Siva heard the woman's fervent prayer. He took the form of the old woman and ran with a medicin-chest in His hand/ to the daughter's house. The girl received the supposed mother with a frown and took her to task for coming so late. The Lord bore it all cheerfully and attended upon her with great care. She gave birth to a blooming boy, and the Lord did all the duties of a midwife. The mother and the baby were well taken care of.

Three days thus passed. The flood subsided and the old woman made the best of her way to the other side of the river and ran to her daughter's house with a heart throbbing with anxiety. Just then the Lord Siva was feeding the child with milk. In rushed the poor mother trembling. At once the Lord vanished. The old woman sat near her daughter and explained the circumstances which had rendered it impossible for her to come in time. "Mother, but you were here all the time! Why do you prattle like this?" said the girl. "No, no, I see it all now!" explained the mother. "Child, know that it is all the Lord's work. I was till now on the other side of the river, being held up by floods. The Lord in His mercy has responded to my prayer." So saying, she fell down in a swoon, overcome with joy. The daughter also understood the truth now. In commemoration of this great work of mercy the Lord on the hill is still known by the name of Thayumanavar.

The child, at whose birth the Lord Himself came to assist, grew up to be a handsome, intelligent and virtuous youth.

One evening, when he went to the temple of Thayumanavar, he came across a deeply meditative sage on the threshold of the shrine of Dakshinamurthi and was attracted by him. He stood speechless, with none of his questioning pranks about him and followed the silent master, asking him what the book was that he was holding in his hands. The gracious sage told him that it was Siva Jñana Siddhi by Saint Aral Nandhi, and encouraged him to go on with his religious studies in his grahastha life before he could make himself fit for the Jñana Path.

Accordingly, the youth pursued his higher studies and his spiritual greatness was known to the chief Viyaranga. When the latter died, his lady Minakshi Ammal was at the helm of the government and became enamoured of the youthful devotee. Her sexcravings got the upper hand and she offered him her principality and her charming self without knowing what a spotless life he lived. The saint pitied the lovely queen and left the place for good. He fled to Ramnad, where he was ~~invited~~ visited by his elder brother and by his cousin and prevailed upon to enter upon the life of a householder. In compliance with their wishes and in obedience to the command of his guru, he went to Vedaranyam and married a girl Mattu-var-kulal Ammai. Of this union one child Kanaka Sabapathi was born, but the mother died in giving birth to him. The young widower took care of the babe and nursed him with all a Father's care and kindness till he came of age and looked after himself.

At this stage the old Guru Mauna Desika appeared and told him that the time had come for him to renaunce the world and devote his time to prayer and meditation. As a homeless ascetic with no attire on, he went from one holy place to another, singing hymns in praise of Siva and xx drawing crowds of admirers by the sweet melody of his verses. He spent the evening of his life at Ramnad in 'commercing with the skies' and attained Samadhi in 1742.

T u k a r a m a
(1598-1650)

I

How Tukarama crossed a swollen river.

A caravan started one day for a distant town from Dehu, a small village in Maharashtra. Tukarama joined it. All along the route, the merchants spent their time in talking noisily. But Tukarama did not like their coarse and empty talk. He sang holy songs, keeping time to his rough music, and danced madly. The merchants were disgusted with him and left him alone saying: "Your Hari has brought only ill-luck to you in your business. Lest the same fate should befall us all, we are leaving you."

It was a dark night. The clouds gathered and it began to rain, very heavily. Three of his bullocks strayed away and he could not find them. He drove the other bullock before him, but in the darkness he did not know where he was going. The bullock thus fell into a pool with the sack on its back. Tukarama began to weep:

"Oh Govinda!" he cried, "have you no mercy on me? Three of my bullocks are gone and the other is in the pool. Who will lift it up for me?"

Vithoba heard his prayers. He took the form of a guide and came to help him. He easily lifted the bullock and the sack out of the pool and lo! the sack and its contents were not spoilt. "Follow me carefully" the guide said. "I will take you to a town close at hand."

Tukarama did as he was told. On the way they had to cross a river swollen with floods. The guide, who was no other than Lord Vishnu, placed the holy wheel on the water. Tukarama got into it, bullock, sack and all. The wheel moved and Tukarama and the bullock were soon on the other side.

When the day broke, the Divine Guide vanished. Tukarama was grateful to Govinda and sang the Glories of the Lord.

II

Tukarama sells chillies.

One day Tukarama was sitting in a Shiva-temple and selling chillies. One by one the customers came. When he was asked the price of chillies, he said: "You may pay me as you please." Chillies cheap at the Shiva-temple! thus the news spread. There was a rush for chillies. Some paid low prices, and a few wicked people did not pay anything at all. Tukarama saw that the sacks were empty. "Oh!" he rejoiced, "I have sold all my goods quickly! What luck! Govinda! This is all due to you!" But Govinda had pity on Tukarama. He took the form of a servant and wearing a fine livery on which was written the name of Tukarama, he went from house to house and said in a stern voice: "Pay my master the proper price! Here are the scales. Bring the chillies here!"

The people were afraid of the servant and paid down the proper price. Collecting the money he went to Tukarama and said: "Master, I have collected the amount which is due to you. Here is it." He then gave the money to Tukarama.

III

How Tukarama helped a poor woman.

One day a poor Brahmin woman came to Tukarama. She was very poorly clad and asked him to give her any old cloth to wear. Tukarama pitied her and, taking his wife's only cloth which was hanging on a peg, gave it to the woman.

Avali, the wife, was bathing at the time and of course was in need of a cloth for herself. She searched but could not find it.

Just at that time some people came to invite Tukarama and his wife to a wedding. "Oh, what a shame!" cried Avali. "How can I appear before them? My mad husband has given my clothes to someone!"

While she was saying this, a fine silken sari was thrown over her. She did not know where it came from. But she put it on.

Tukarama was filled with wonder. "Vithoba!" he cried, "you have not forsaken me!"

IV

How Tukarama looked after a Ragi garden.

One day a farmer named Ranade met Tukarama and said to him: "I have to go away from the town for six months. Will you take care of my ragi garden till I come back?" Tukarama agreed.

Ranade went away and Tukarama took charge of the garden. The parrits and the swallows came and fed on the crops. Tukarama took pity on them. "Poor birds" he said to them, "what will you do when there is a famine? Eat as much as you can, but not too much; otherwise you will be ill."

This was how Tukarama watched the garden. The birds came every day and ate up the whole of the crop. Tukarama spent his time in the garden singing holy songs.

The six months passed and the farmer returned. He was mad with fury when he didn't see a single grain of the stalks and made him appear before the judge for his neglect of duty.

The judge passed orders to the effect that Tukarama should pay two maunds of ragi to the farmer for the loss of his crop. Tukarama agreed to give Ranade the two maunds of ragi.

The next morning, a friend of Tukarama went to the garden, and what did he see there? The field was rich with crops and every ear of corn was ripe. When cut and gathered the crop weighed twenty-two maunds.

V

Tukarama and Mambaji.

One day Tukarama's cow strayed into the compound of Mambaji, a Brahmin, proud of his learning and jealous of Tukarama. The angry Brahmin asked: "whose cow is it?" Some-one said: "It belongs to Tukarama." When he heard the name of Tukarama, the Brahmin became very angry. "I will teach a lesson to that fellow!" he cried in a loud voice.

When Tukarama went to the temple, Mambaji asked him, how he dared to drive his cow into his compound, and struck Tukarama with a thorny shrub on his back. The thorns injured his body and made his back bleed.

Tukarama did not say a word, but only thought that perhaps he deserved it. He went to the temple and began to teach the people, unmindful of the injury he had received. He was going on with his teaching, but suddenly he stopped when he saw that Mambaji was not there. He ran to the Brahmin's house, and, falling at his feet, said: "Holy and pious one, pardon this sinner for the offence he gave you. Pray, honour the meeting with your presence to-day as usual." The Brahmin was ashamed of his conduct. From that day, he and Tukarama became fast friends.

VI

Shivaji meets Tukarama.

The great Mahratta hero, Shivaji, wished to see Tukarama. One morning, he loaded several horses with gems and jewels and set out for Tukarama's village with his followers. The party reached Dehu soon after sun-set. Tukarama was in the temple. Many people had come to hear his sermons.

Shivaji made his way through the crowds and, placing all the jewels at the feet of Tukarama, bent low at his feet and worshipped him.

When Tukarama saw the jewels, he cried: "What is all this, Maharaj! Why should I want money and jewels? Vithoba is enough for me. He is my wealth and my life. I beg you to give these presents to Brahmins. I shall be pleased if you will

follow Vittala and repeat His name a thousand times every day. I shall also be glad if you will observe the Ekadashi Vratha and put on your neck the garland of Tulsi beads."

Shivaji listened to the outpourings of Tukamara and became a changed man. He wanted to renounce his kingdom and all his wealth and become a Sannyasi.

But at the earnest entreaties of Shivaji's mother, Tukarama advised him to perform his duty as a king, to honour women and protect the Hindu Dharma. Shivaji obeyed the Saint.

T u l a s i d a s

I

Tulasi Das was a Sarayuparina Brahmin by birth. His birth was unfortunate;it took place under a conjunction of stars which was considered to portend death to the Parents. To avoid danger themselves,the father and mother abandoned him. A sadhu picked him up and took care of him. It was from this sadhu that he learnt the story of Rama.

While yet young, he married a girl named Ratnavali and had a son by her. He was passionately devoted to his wife. After the son had been born,one day,when Tulasi Das came home, he found that his wife had gone to her father's house without letting him know of it.

Tulasi Das was restless and mad because of the absence of his wife. He resolved to start at once for his father-in-law's house. The night was far advanced and it was pitch dark everywhere. The rains were pouring down,and the winds were blowing furiously. But Tulasi Das' heart was set upon the journey. Undaunted either by the terrible darkness or by the inclement weather, he got out of his house and ran on speedily till he came to the bed of a river which he found was in high flood. With a reckless disregard of his life he soon plunged into the stream. The waters were about to devour him when, fortunately, a rotten corpse came floating by. Thinking it to be a piece of wood, he caught hold of it and managed to reach the other side with great difficulty. His limbs had become completely tired out by now, but he could not think of any rest for himself till he had reached his wife's side. So he again began to ran and continued to run for some hours till he had reached his destination. But here another difficulty faced him.

The doors of the house had been locked from inside. He knocked many times but there was no answer. The impatient man thought of scaling the walls and getting inside. A huge cobra was hanging down from the wall, and taking it for a piece of rope, he caught firm hold of it and climbing up the wall, found his beloved wife sleeping on the other side. He woke her up. The lady was astonished to see him at that hour of the night and asked him why he had come exposing himself to the wind and the rain, and how he had got into the house. Tulasi Das told her that it was his infatuation for her that had brought him there and that he had scaled the wall with the help of the rope which she in her love for him had hung up. The lady had done no such thing and so in order to see how her husband had come she lighted a lamp and went near the wall with him. To their great surprise and horror they saw a huge serpent there. The wife was touched by her husband's devotion and she said: "You have such a fondness for my body which is but a cage of bone and flesh. If you have even a tenth part of this love for Rama, how very blessed you will be."

Immediately on hearing these words, Tulasi Das became 'converted' and set out again for his own village. His wife who had by no means any idea of producing so violent a reaction followed, calling him back and asking him to stay and eat so that she might return with him. But 'what could a fan do in the face of a whirlwind?' Tulasi Das from that moment became a released worshipper of Rama.

II

Tulasi Das and the Cowherd.

In the course of his journeys, Tulasi Das went to a place called Kant. There not only did he find no place where he could get any food, but was distressed to see the people devoted to customs and manners of fenal demons.

The cowherd of the place,however,was very kind to him. His name was Nanga Ahir. He had a cattle-yard in the open plain,where he used to offer hospitality to Holy Men. With great humility he invited Tulasi Das thither and gave him some milk with which the saint boiled down into Khoa and ate. He then told Nangar to ask for a boon. The cowherd begged that he might be endowed with perfect faith in the Lord, and that his family,which was short-lived,might be a long-lived one.

Tulasi Das replied: "If you and your family commit no theft and avoid causing any affliction to any person,your desire will be fulfilled."

It is said that the blessing has been fulfilled.

III

One day a murderer came on pilgrimage, crying: "For the love of Rama,throw alms to me, a murderer!" Tulasi Das,hearing the beloved name,called him to his house,gave him sacred food which had been consecrated to the gods,declared him to be purified and sang praises in honour of his deity. The Brahmins of Benares held an assembly and sent for him,asking: "How was the murderer's sin absolved?" and "How had he eaten with him?"

Tulasi Das replied: "Go and read your Scriptures! Their truth hath not yet entered your hearts! Your intellects are not yet ripe and they do not remove the darkness from your souls." They maintained that they knew of the power of the Name as recorded in the Scriptures and asked: "How can this man,a murderer, obtain salvation?" Tulasi Das then asked them to name some proof by which he could convince them,and at length they agreed that if the sacred bull of Shiva would eat from the murderer's hand, they would confess themselves to be wrong. The man was taken to the temple,and the bull at once ate out of his hands.Thus did Tulasi Das teach them that repentance of even the greatest sinner is accepted by the Lord. The miracle had the effect of converting thousands of men and making them lead holy lives.

The result enraged the Kali-Yuga (the present age of sin personified) who came to Tulasi Das and threatened him saying: "I% will straightaway devour thee,unless thou promise to stop this increase of piety." Full of terror,Tulasi Das confided everything to Hanuman who told him to lodge a complaint in the court of the Lord Himself. "Write a Binaya Patrika,a petition of complaint,and I shall get an order passed on it by the Master and will be empowered to punish the Kali-Yuga." Tulasi Das accordingly wrote a collection of beautiful and touching hymns addressed to Rama unter the title of Binaya Patrika.

IV

While at Ayodya,Rama appeared before him in a dream and commanded him to write a Ramayana in the vernacular language used by the common people. In a spirit of true devotion and humility he took up the God-ordained work and completed it in a short time. One day,when he was bathing at the Manikarnika ghat, a pandit who was proud of his high learning and attainments in Sanskrit,came up to him and said: "Reverend Sir,your honour is a learned Sanskrit pandit.Why, therefore,did you compose an Epic in the vulgar tongue?" Tulasi Das replied: "My language in the vulgar tongue is imperfect,I admit, but it is better than the nayikavarnanas of you,Sanskrit-knowing gentlemen.""How is that?" asked the Pandit. "Because" said Tulasi Das, "if you find a jewelled vessel full of poison and an earthen cup full of ambrosia,which wilt thou refuse and which wilt thou accept? Tell me this after considering the matter."The Pandit was humbled into silence.

V

Once some thieves came by night to steal and plunder Tulasi Das' goods, but saw a cloud-dark form with bow and arrow in His hand. Whereever they moved,the form approached them with ready shaft. They were terrified;and although they went round and round,they could not get rid of the watchman. At day-break,they came and asked Tulasi Das: "O Sir,who is this dark-complexioned lad of yours!" On hearing this question,he remained silent and wept; then he gave away all that he had,knowing that Rama himself had been the watchman. The thieves too were initiated and received instruction and became pure of heart.

R a m a d a s a
(1608-1681)

I

Ramadasa's first Vision of Rama.

One rainy ~~xxx~~ evening a poor man came to Ramadasa's house. He was clad in rags and was shivering with cold.Ramadasa took him and gave him a good cloth and a nice dinner.

"Brother,which is your native place? Where do you go now?" asked Ramadasa. "You are very kind to me" the stranger replied. "I live on the hill of Bhadrachalam. There is no one to care for me now. I go about the country and live on alms."

Early next morning,the guest took leave of Ramadasa. Ramadasa was looking on him,as he was going away. To his great surprise,the stranger seemed to grow young and beautiful. He turned back. Ramadasa saw his face. It was the Divine Rama Himself. The vision was granted to Ramadasa only for a minute. Then he could not see any one on the road.

Ramadasa felt sorry.His Beloved had come to his house,but he had not had the eyes to see Him.

II

Ramadasa could not rest till he saw His Beloved at Bhadrachalam. So he started one day for the place. He walked all the way. He saw a ruined temple on the top of the hill. Inside it there was a beautiful image of Sri Rama. He worshipped the image. Then he talked to some people there.

They told him: "Once upon a time this temple was very famous. But now,there is no regular worship here. The Nawab does not care for our temples. As is the king, so are the subjects."

Ramadasa heard them with tears and then said to himself: "I now see the meaning of the vision.The Lord came to me to command me to renovate the temple.I have no money,but I am sure He will show me the way."

Ramadasa then returned to Nalgonda, his native place.

III

Ramadasa as Tahsildar.

Ramadasa spent away everything he inherited from his father in serving the poor, and became a baggar. All the people af the village pitied him.

With poverty his devotion to God grew greater and greater. His desire to build the temple at Bhadrachalam anew also grew day by day. What could he do? He prayed day and night: "O Lord, show me the way."

Fortunately for him, the Tahsildarship of Bhadrachalam was vacant at the time and his uncles,Akkanara and Madanna, who were respectively army commander and Prime Minister took pity on him and recommended his name for the vacant post.

The Nawab was pleased with him and at once made him the Tahsildar of Bhadrachalam.

IV

Ramadasa builds the temple of Rama.

As a Tahsildar,Ramadasa did his duty very well. He was kind to all. He helped the poor. The Nawab heard all this and was glad.

The example of Ramadasa was not lost on the people. The temple on the hill became more popular. All the people began to think with Ramadasa: "We should soon rebuild this temple!" They raised funds and started to build the temple. It took a long time. Ramadasa was impatient to finish it quickly.

He had no money. He had spent all his earnings. But he had in his keeping

six lakhs of Varahar of the Circar money. He thought:"Why not use this money in the Lord's service? No wrong would come of it. If Sri Rama is pleased,the whole world will be pleased."

Right or wrong, the large amount of Corcar money was spent openly. The temple was completed and it looked very grand. The worship was conducted regularly.Ramadasa was satisfied.The object of his life was fulfilled.

V

Ramadasa a Prisoner.

The news that Ramadasa has spent the Circar money in building the temple at Bhadrachalam soon reached the ears of the Nawab. He was very angry.He sent a dozen sepoys to arrest Ramadasa. Soon they entered his house and demanded the immediate payment of the Circar money. Ramadasa made no reply. He prepared to follow the sepoys. He gave good counsels to his wife and son and came out into the street. There was a large crowd. Every one was weeping. Ramadasa consoled them and said: "Do not be sad. All will be well with me.Sing the praise of Rama!

The sepoys took him to Golconda. The Nawab asked him: "How dare you misuse the Corcar money?" Ramadasa was silent.

The Nawab ordered the sepoys to torture him and to put him in prison. They took him at his word and made Ramadasa stand on burning sands in the hot sun with a heavy weight on his back. They beat him, spat in his face, bound him with heavy chains and left him alone in a dark cell. Ramadasa submitted to everything meekly. He closed his eyes and chanted the name of the Lord.

In course of time the men began to think: "It is useless to trouble him", so they left him alone.

VI

How Ramadasa was released.

Twelve years went by. Ramadasa was still in jail. His body was reduced to a skeleton by the frequent fasts to which he subjected himself. He spent all the time singing the glories of the Lord.

One night he felt a burning pain all over his body. He could not bear it and made up his mind to put an end to his life. Just than a voice was heard to say: "Despair not! I am with thee!" Ramadasa eagerly looked around. But he could see no one. He said to himself:"It is the voice of my Beloved."

Morning dawned. The Nawab stood bending before him in his cell and begging forgiveness. Ramadasa was surprised.

"From this moment I am the servant of your servants" said the Nawab. He added: "Two merchants came to me last night. They were handsome looking young men. One of them said: "We are brothers. My name is Ramaji. My brother's name is Lakshmaji. We are servants of Ramadasa and come from Bhadrachalam. We have come to pay you the money due to you from Ramadasa." They then poured out of a purse a heap of gold coins and demanded a receipt for the amount. I gave a receipt for six Lakhs of Varahas. On receiving it, they disappeared. My wonder knew no bounds. I thought they could not have been ordinary men. Then my eyes were opened as to the great wrong that I had done to you. I have come to implore your pardon."

Tears of joy ran down the face of Ramadasa, as he heard the events with rapt attention. "You are blessed" said he.

The Nawab at once ordered the release of Ramadasa. Ramadasa went to Bhadrachalam with the Nawab and showed him the temple of Sri Rama. Both of them worshipped the Lord and sang His praise.

Gnana Sambandar

I

One day Shiva Pada Truthaiyar (father of Sambandar)was preparing to go to the temple tank for his usual bath. The little one,now three years old,wanted to follow his father and cried. The man took the child to the tank.

He went into the water breast deep and closing his eyes and uttering some mantras dipped himself three times. Meanwhile the child caught sight of the tower of the Shiva temple and was immediately inspired to sing the name of the Lord and His consort Parvati.

The Divine Father and Mother mounted on the bull and appeared before the sobbing child. Instructed by shiva, Parvati poured some milk from Her breast into a gold cup and appeased the child's hunger.

As soon as the milk of Divine Knowledge was given the child stopped crying and sang a hymn, describing Shiva in perfect style.

II

How he cured a maiden.

In one of the temples at Malnad a man called Mollimalavan was praying before God. His daughter was suffering from a dreadful disease. The doctors gave up all hopes about her. Mollimalavan took his daughter to the temple and laid her before God and prayed for Divine mercy. While he was thus praying he heard trumpets blowing and the herald crying out the name of Gnana Sambandar.

Leaving his daughter at the foot of the altar he ran into the town and fell at the feet of Sambandar. The whole party then moved on to the temple. There near the altar Sambandar saw a girl lying down in a hopeless and helpless condition and asked, who she was. Mollimalavan then told him that he was the unfortunate father of the girl and wept.

The boy-saint took pity on the girl and prayed to Shiva to restore her to good health. At the close of the hymn she woke up as if from sleep. The father and the Girl then fell at the feet of Sambandar and worshipped him.

III

Famine-relief.

Once the two saints, Appar and Sambandar, were staying at a place called Milali. They heard that a famine was raging in the country. The Kaveri had dried up. There was not a single blade of grass anywhere. Men and cattle were dying in large numbers every day. The two saints were deeply distressed. They prayed to the Lord of Milali to save His devotees from the famine. The God appeared to them in a vision and said: "We heard your appeal. The people of the place will get relief through you both. You will find two gold coins on the altar every morning." Next morning the saints went to the altar and found two gold coins, one on each side of the altar. With this money they bought food and gave it to the hungry Saivites. Thus the good work went on till the Land was free from famine.

IV

At the temple of Vedaranyam .

The two saints Appar and Sambandar then went to worship the God at Vedaranyam. In bygone ages the Vedas themselves worshipped God there. After the Vedas no one was thought fit to enter the temple by the main gate. So the doors locked themselves. Now Appar and Sambandar wanted to enter the temple by the main gate. They waited long before it, but it did not open.

Appar then sang a hymn in honour of the Lord, imploring Him to open the

gates. At first the doors did not open, but when the last quatrain of the song was reached, the gates flew open, to the wonder and admiration of the worshipping crowd. The saints prostrated themselves before the Lord and sang His glories.

Before leaving the temple, Sambandar sang another hymn. As a result of which the doors shut again of their own accord.

The people of Vedaranyam had a sight of the Lord that day owing to the presence and grace of the "Great Ones". But how were they to have the blessed sight hereafter? They fell at the feet of the saints and requested to be shown the way. Sambandar asked them to sing the songs which they themselves had sung on that day, telling them that the All-Merciful God fulfill their desires.

V

Sundara Pandya.

In the time of the saint Sambandar, the Pandya king was known as Kun Pandya (Pandya, the hunch-back). He was a staunch Jain and hated the Saivas with a passionate hatred. But the queen mangayar-pavasi was a lover of Siva and his devotees.

Once Kun Pandya was suffering from high fever. The Queen and the Ministers were alarmed and sent for Sambandar. He came. The Queen bent low at his feet and said: "The king is very ill. What can I do?"

"Do not be afraid" said Sambandar. "Everything happens for the best. If the king will allow me, I can cure him of the fever."

In the meanwhile the Jain doctors had been ordered to cure him, They prayed to Arhat, but no, the fever continued.

Then the Queen humbly said: "Let me bring the Brahmin saint. He says he can cure you."

"Very well, bring him here!" ordered Kun Pandya.

Sambandar came and sitting near the king's bed he rubbed the body of the king with the holy ashes and sang a Pathigam. Lo! the body became cool instantly. And the king rose from his bed as if he had had no fever.

Kun Pandya now said: "Oh, Holy Saint Sambandar, from this day I am your humble follower. Please take me into your fold and give me upadesa."

The upadesa was duly given and Kun Pandya became a true Saiva. But the Queen was not satisfied, She fell at Sambandar's feet and said: "Lord, my husband is now your devotee. Pray remove the hunch from his back." Sambandar called Kun Pandya to his side and singing a hymn, he rubbed the Holy Ashes on his back. Lo! The King stood tall and straight in all his glory. Kun Pandya was changed into Sundara Pandya.

R A M A M I S R A

Y A M U N A C H A R Y A

Y a m u n a c h a r y a

Yamunacharya was placed under one Maha Bhashya Bhatta ,a famous Pandit of the time , to study the various systems of religion and philosophy.In common with the others of his class , the Pandit used to pay an annual tribute to one Akkiyalvan , the Royal Chaplain ,and the terror of all the learned men ,far and near. One day , his servants came to demand of him his yearly tribute ,but the Pandit was not behind others of his class in the possession of the only quality they had in common - extreme poverty .He was gloomily thinking over his inability to pay the very small sum of money ,and of the probable consequences that would follow , when Yamuna came up to him and said , - ' What is it that lies so heavy on my Lord's heart?'

' Nothing , my dear boy , ' replied the Pandit , 'but the demand of that haughty man , Akkiyalvan , for his annual tribute. I fear I shall not be able to send it.'

Yamuna laughed long and shrill, ' What ! You to allow this trifle to cloud the serenity of your mind ! Then , have I been your servant to no purpose ?'

He thereupon turned to the messengers and said with a laugh of derision , ' Tell your master from me that Maha Bhashya Bhatta 's pupil denies his right to any tribute and thus tears his orders to pieces . '

When the news was carried to him , Akkiyalvan was beside himself with rage . ' Is he a mere composer of rhymes or a proficient in the Shastras ?" - he sent back word . Yamuna's reply almost took his breath away. ' No mere poet am I , nor a mere Shastrin , but I am a terror to every one that dare oppose me in disputations . '

' This is passing strange ',thought the Pandit ,and informed the King of it .The latter commanded Yamuna's ~~presence~~ immediate presence before him ,but his mandate fared no better . 'There is something in all this ' ,said the King to himself .'Great indeed must be his merit or his audacity who should dare trifle with me thus. Well , I shall assume the best .' A palanquin and the other ~~appurtenances~~ appurtenances of honour were sent to fetch him ; and Yamuna , satisfied at last of having made himself felt ,set out for the palace. Meanwhile he sent a messenger to the King to proclaim/~~his~~/ his presence - ' The Great Yamunacharya ,the terror of all that dare oppose him in argument ,is on his way here . Your Majesty would do well to search the whole of India ,from the snow-capped Himalayas to the shores of the Southern Sea ,sanctified by the feet of Sri Ramachandra ,to furnish him with a Pandit worthy to hold debate with him in any branch of knowledge ,lay or spiritual . '

In due time ,he reached the palace ,and the Royal Pandit was all eager to engage him in argument then and there . But Yamuna was too clever to be taken at a disadvantage .' Nay , not so', said he to the King ; ' if we were to argue before Your Majesty , you would not be able to find out who won ; and neither of us would willingly acknowledge that he had been defeated. So let the learned men of the place be assembled ,and an umpire chosen .' It took no time ,for all the town was there to witness this strange intellectual combat between that slip of a boy and Akkiyalvan ,the hero of many a hard-won fight.

The Queen who was watching with a curious interest the ~~strange~~ strange scene ,said to the King , ' My heart yearns after the bright boy .If he be worsted ,as I know he cannot be , I consent to be thrown to the wild dogs; but if he wins , you should promise me to give him half of your kingdom.' The King ,whose faith in the in-

vulnerability of his Pandit was strong ,readily accepted the challeng and fondly expected it would be only a walk-over for Akkiyalvan . By that time , the vast audience -hall was densely packed with eager crowds of Pandits , Shastrins ,poets, philosophers and sight-seers. The King took his seat ,and the proceedings began .

Yamunacharya came out victorious in the contest. Then Yamuna rose and said ,' Fair Sir , I need not point out to you that by the rules of the challenge your honour is forfeit ,and nothing stands between you and ~~chastisement~~ the chastisement you so richly deserve- But you may thank your grey hairs ,and the position you hold as Pandit to the King , that I spare you the indignity . I may here suggest to you that you would do well to employ ~~a few years~~ the few years that you have to live in learning to know yourself better and in using your talents and position to benefit and honour others of your class , and not to insult or oppress them . '

[illegible]

or

[illegible]

Sri Krishnabhushi Natha

of

Thirukkannangudi

Lakshmi

Sri Krishna Lakshmi Natha one of the village of Thirukkannangudi and was a married man. Natha Muni initiated him into the mysteries of the True Faith ,and directed him to return to his village and lay out a flower-garden for the use of the Lord Ranga Natha in that place.Krishna followed his master's behests and devoted himself so completely to the service of the Lord that he progressed very fast in holiness and purity.

One day , two hunters went into the temple to offer their worship to the Lord and left their shoes outside in charge of their faithful hounds. Very soon the animals began to quarrel ,and the quarrel developed into a set fight.Their owners rushed out at the noise ,and , by their cries ,encouraged the already infuriated hounds . A large crowd of sight-seers gathered round them , watching with deep interest the strange combat.

In the end , one of the dogs was so frightfully mangled by the other that it fell to rise no more ,and its owner ,maddened with rage at the loss of his favourite hound ,drew his sword and cut off the head of the victor.Forthwith flashed the sword of its master upon him ,and long and fiercely did they fight until both of them lay on the ground , bleeding to death of their countless wounds.

Meanwhile , Sri Krishna Lakshmi Natha was an unwilling spectator of the whole ,being prevented by the dense crowd from proceeding to the temple to lay his daily garland of flowers at the feet of the Lord. The scene affected him curiously and with a strange powerful at once , he flung aside the garland and cried , -

' Lo ! these poor animals,irrational and devoid of the Divine Spark, have cheerfully laid down their lives in the service of their masters ,out of pure attachment and gratitude .And they ,in their turn, have sacrificed themselves to avenge an injury inflicted upon an animal whom they called their own , and who looked upon to them for protection. And shall I conclude that the All-Father and the Great-Mother are less attached to their children and more callous to their sufferings ? Far from me be such an unholy thought. Right here I renounce every worldly tie ,and take my refuge in Thy Infinite Mercy.Lord , Thy will be done !'

He was a changed man from that moment ,and his ways were stranger still. In imitation of the hounds that brought about His conversion ,he reduced himself to a state of nature and ran about on all fours. At the dawn of the day , he went out of the village to clean his body and run back to the temple ,where he lay thereafter under a tree within its walls , silent ,motionless and rapt in meditation. His Master took good care to see that he was supplied with the very little food he required.The strange spectacle attracted numerous crowds from all parts of the land.Some gazed at him idly with a vacant curious eye ,or pitied or criticised him, while others offered him their reverence from a distance.

One night , the people of that place ,men and women ,young and old , had a dream in which the Lord Ranga Nayaka appeared to them and said , ' To-morrow at such an hour of the day ,I will set to present yourselves at My temple , for I mean to take unto Myself that most beloved servant of Mine ,even Sri Krishna . '

most beloved servant of Him ,even Sri Krishna .'

A dense crowd thronged the court-yards of the temple and spread far and wide ,long ,long before the appointed time.Next morning , Sri Krishna went out as usual ,but instead of returning to his place under the tree , he made the circuit of the sacred courtyards one after another ,the vast crowd walking behind with silent awe and reverence. He made his way to the Holy of Holies , even to the feet of the Throne ,and lifted his eyes to the Lord as if awaiting His commands .The next moment , a dazzling radiance filled the place and blinded their eyes ,and when they opened them again , there was the image of the Lord Thakte Vatsala ,with the eternal look of holy calm upon its countenance . But they saw h i m no more - the living exponent of the Doctrine of Surrender to the Divine Will , whom the Lord had gathered unto His bosom .

INDIA

Bhima

Once there was a potter called Bhima who lived at some distance from Tirupati. He and his wife were ardent devotees of the Lord Venkatesa, and as became poor people, laid before his clay image at their home house clay lotuses in all humility and devotion.

Now there was a Tondaman king who was or thought himself very dear to the Lord and who failed not to worship Him every day with lotuses made of pure gold. One day, he was struck dumb to see all his golden lotuses thrown down and lotuses made of clay occupying their place before the Lord. And that too, day after day, and inspite of the strictest watch that the king set to find out the criminal that dared insult His majesty thus.

At the end of many days, he was no wiser, and following the suggestion of someone, he sought far and near for any devout worshipper of Lord Venkatesa.

After a long and weary search, he came upon the potter and his wife; watched them lay their clay lotuses at the feet of the clay image of Venkatesa, and stood in mute amazement at the sight of such perfect devotion amidst such unpleasant surroundings. He recognised in him the Lord's favourite and his own master and forthwith took refuge in him.

KANCHI PURNA

K a n c h i P u r n a

During His incarnations on earth , the Lord has ,more than once , played the part of a servant towards His devotees ,faithful and humble.There was not one act of service that His devotees performed towards Himself ,but He discharged it faithfully in the case of Kanchi P u r n a , who was engaged in the service of fanning the Lord at Kanchi.Lord Varadaraja would converse with him for ,far into the night .Now ,He would suddenly come upon him in the guise of one of his disciples bringing him his sandals ; now he would come upon him as a servant of the temple ,lighting him on his way home.So much so , that Kanchi Purna was quite vexed and ashamed . So ,one day , he said to himself ,' My Lord will very soon make me forget myself and what I owe Him.I shall go over to Tirupati ,where , I believe , it will not be so bad as here .' But after a time , he was surprised to hear Venkatesa say ,' You have stayed here long enough.Repair to Kanchi and fan us there ,where we require it more, because of the Fountain of Fire from which we sprang.' Kanchi Purna returned to Kanchi ,and when he was a short way from it , he was met by the Lord ,who said to him ,' And so ,you would fly from us , would you ? ' - ' Nay , my Lord , Your kindness makes me ashamed of myself .'- ' Well ,you will get over it ,in course of time .' And so he did ; for the Lord never changed His ways .In fact , He used to walk arm in arm with the Divine Mother in the halls of the temple ,visible to the eyes of KanchiPurna alone.

Ramanuja was very much attracted by the greatness and spiritual eminence of Kanchi Purna (otherwise called Nambi) and he concluded that he could not find a better master to serve. So he sought him out ,and ,with humble salutations ,said ,' Lord ,if it be thy will ,deign to accept me as one of your pupils and set my feet upon the path that leads to the Lord of all .' ' Nay , not so ,my dear Sir. Far be it from me to assume a position I am not qualified to.You wanted to do this ,induced perhaps by the favour the Lord Varadaraja extends towards my unworthy self .' ' But' ,interrupted Ramanuja , ' the Sacred Books teach us that the Great Ones do take birth in all classes of society and that birth is but a minor consideration in the case of those that have been behind the veil and have seen the Lord face to face.' ' Nay ,nay ; you do me too much honour .I am entirely unworthy of it. But ,even granting it for argument's sake ,should we not be the first to see that the regulations of caste and the classes are preserved in their original purity ? Have not the Great Ones based the constitution of ~~ecc~~ society on these ? The man of perfect knowledge should not unsettle the foolish whose knowledge is imperfect.' ' My devotion to you shall be none the less for the social barriers that ~~stand~~ prevent the realisation of my dearest hopes ,' sadly replied Ramanuja , and took leave of Nambi.

All the live long night Ramanuja lay thinking how to accomplish his object. He wanted to partake of the remains of Nambi's meal, hoping thus to establish an indirect spiritual connection with Nambi. The next morning he proceeded to Nambi's residence and entreated him to partake of a meal in his house that noon.'Be it so' ,replied Nambi, with a smile.Ramanuja returned to his dwelling place and directed his wife to prepare her best against the arrival of his friend. He quickly went through his daily duties and took the way to Nambi's house along the southern street.Meanwhile , Nambi , whose keen eye nothing could escape ,divined the intention of his friend. So he had already reached

RAMANUJA & ALWAN

Ramanuja and Alwan

Once Ramanuja went to Gosti Purna to get himself initiated into the secrets of the Charama Sloka. The latter led him to a room above and took careful precautions that no one approached the place. He then made Ramanuja swear by his feet that he would not divulge it to a n y o n e w h a t s o e v e r and out of his great love and compassion initiated him into the secrets of the Charama Sloka, the last and and the most precious teaching of Lord Krishna.

" Bear well in mind the injunctions of the Lord Himself , 'Never is this to be spoken to any one who is not self-controlled nor without devotion ,not to one who desireth to listen or yet to one who speaketh evil of Me . He who shall declare this supreme secret among My devotees ,having shown the highest devotion for Me ,doubtless he shall come unto Me' - and take care it falls not upon the ears of the profane . "

" Never would I be guilty of such a heinous sin ; but my follower and friend Srivatsanka (Alwan) is as faithful a servant of the Lord as one could desire ,and I cannot withhold it from him."

"He may ,as you say , be qualified to receive it; but even in his case let him wait upon you for a year; test well his sincerity and earnestness; and if you are thoroughly satisfied with him , instruct him."

" Thy command shall be obeyed " ,repliedRamanuja ,and took leave of him.

Immediately upon his return Srivatsanka waited upon him and to him said Ramanuja:-" It is only now that Alavandar's grace towards me has borne fruit; it is only now that his prayers to the Lord of Kanchi have been answered ; it is only now that the Holy Goshti Purna has made me the heir to Immortality. He has strictly enjoined me ,even in your case , to require of you to wait upon me for a year and to initiate you thereafter if I am satisfied with your earnestness of purpose and sincerity of ~~devtion~~ devotion. "

Srivatsanka withdrew in sorrow and said to himself:-"To wait for a year ! and presume upon the certainty of my stay in this body till then ! I w i l l have it or die ! " A bright idea flashed across his mind and he cried , ' Now I have it; the Smritis lay it down that a month's fasting at the gates of one's guru is equal in merit to waiting upon him for a year. Anyhow I have minimised the evil," and for a month he waited at the gates of Ramanuja's Math, fasting and sleepless ,but calm and serene as ever. Ramanuja came to know of it and ,touched to the core of his being by his devotion ~~to him~~ and earnestness , imparted to him the Last Word.

[illegible]

The reforms [illegible] introduced in the temple at Srirangam, the strictness of discipline that he enforced ,and his perfect unassailability by any temptations ,roused the temple officials against him who had vowed fet and led and easy life under a more lenient régime. They very soon understood that they were never safe as long as Ramanuja was at the head of affairs ,and there ceased no chance of his being otherwise.Death alone could remove him from his place ,and death alone would make him powerless against them ; and his death they set themselves to compass. His habits were very regular ; he lived upon the food that he begged from the house-holders ,and limited his visits to seven [illegible] houses. So his enemies bribed one of the seven to poison his food; and the wretch ordered his wife to take it to Ramanuja when he should come to their houses on his rounds. She stoutly refused ,but being horribly tortured to do it ,she placed the poisoned food before the Master ,prostrated herself before him and took the opportunity slightly to scratch with her finger-nails the feet of the Blessed One. A little thought over that revealed to him the state of things; he threw away the poisoned food into the waters of the Cauvery and from that time he discontinued his rounds , preferring to fast rather than expose his life uselessly.

Devotion to the Lord

Srirangam with the utmost speed. Ramanuja [illegible] meet him and cast his at noon in the burning sands of the Cauvery .He fell at the feet of his Master and lay there until he would be ordered to get up.But Goshti Purna looked on in silent indifference. This was too much for his disciples who already indignant that their beloved Master was obliged to fast were now all the more enraged to see his here holy reposing on the scorching sands. And what was worse still ,their Master moved not ,nor gave the least sign of discomfort. But who would dare to upset or complain ,when their Master set them the example ?

There was one among them ,however , whose devotion to his Master was stronger than the fear of his displeasure or the possible anger of his Master's Master.And Kurattarti Perumal (for that was the name of this beloved disciple) burst out in angry tears , " What an affectionate Master you are ! You are a nice pair ,You and your disciple here . What shall I call a man who throws a delicate garland of sweet-scented flowers into the blazing sun ? Do you seek to kill my beloved Master ? " and he furthwith placed Ramanuja upon his back and lay in his place .

Goshti Purna looked at the bold one with a smile , " Really my friend ,you think me an unfeeling wretch and curse me out of the great love you bear for your Master ,do you not ? But he himself will tell you that you may travel far and not find anyone that loves him as well and dearly as I do.I wanted to see whether there was anyone in this group that loved him better than his life here and his hopes of salvation hereafter ,and you are he . You can [illegible] to the winds what you spoke thus; and I honour you all the more for it.I entrust you with the care of his health ,and his life ,and I shall seek it

At your beck ,yes ,to the seventh generation! From this day you will prepare his meals yourself ,and trust no other to come near it. On your life be it !"

"As my lord wills" ,replied the favoured one .

G O V I N D A

'What ! I pollute the Holy Sanctuary of the Lord in the heart with thoughts carnal and impure ? Dare I drag into the Light of the Supreme Soul things of darkness and body ? Alas ! I sought for darkness and solitude .But the Lord is ever with me ,and never can there be darkness where He is ,nor solitude .'

The by-stander took this information to Lord Ramanuja who said to Govinda ,'Govinda ,how did you pass the night with your wife?'

' In the steady light of the Inner Ruler ,I could not find the darkness and solitude necessary for the purpose .'

'If it be your dispassion for the world and its doings is so marked ,why do you take orders and follow the natural bent of your heart ? You would be of great service to work for Humanity.'

'This has been my heart's wish and longing for a long time , but I dare not ask it of my Master ,lest he should be displeased with me ,and think me as yet not to take up the heavy responsibility.'

' None would grudge it , least of all myself' ,replied the Master; forthwith he invested Govinda with the staff and the orange-robes ,and joyfully welcomed him as a fellow-labourer in the Lord's vineyard.' I shall give you your own name ,' said Bhagavan Ramanuja , 'and shall thus myself be honoured by your accepting it.'

' No ,no ,my Master , ' cried Govinda in great consternation. ' Can there be a greater sacrilege than that I who am less than the dust under Thy Holy Feet should have the audacity to bear the same name as Thyself ? Thine is a cruel kindness. I am all too weak and unworthy to bear it. Let me have something safer,'

'Be it as you desire' .replied the Master ,' I shall only shorten it for your sake .Govinda shall henceforth be known among the elect as 'Ambar'.(Ramanuja's other name was Ubhayavedanta)

Govinda (Ambar) ,His utter self-lessness and modesty.

Some time after two Vaishnavas travelled from the West to sit at the feet of the Master. They entered the town and asked a passer-by to direct them to the Math of Bhagavan Ramanuja the Lord.

'Which?' replied the person addressed.

'What /!' asked in amazement.'are there two of them ,then ? How does it come that the Doctrine has two teachers? A schism ? and that so soon ?

'So ,no !' rejoined.'The Lord save us from such a mishap. Do you not know there is the Math of Devarajamuni too (Ambar) ?'

'So , we have never heard of him .We would be guided to the Math of our Lord.'

He then directed them there forthwith. News came to the ears of him who was the unconscious cause of all this confusion,and disturbed him greatly.'Alas !I have sinned it all to myself. I have sinned against my Guru in that I have driven away from him and gave room for men to speak of me on the same footing with the holy one !'

He roused his Math and ,falling Ramanuja's Master's feet ,he sobbed out :' Lord ,Lord , is it not enough that this child has been driven from the light of Thy grace and wandered far in the gloom ever so long ? And how long, O Lord , how long dost Thou seem to keep myself aloof ? !

'What is this?' asked the Master in utter bewilderment. Thereupon Devaraja (Ambar) related the incident in all its details. Ramanuja heard him out in silence and said ,' What then do you want me to do?'-'From this very moment let me remain with thee for ever and

A l w a n

One morning ,it rained cats and dogs ,and it was too late to go for alms. As it was quite unusual for Alwan to have with him any remains of the previous day's alms ,he conducted the worship of the household God ,contenting himself with placing at His feet a fruit as a humble offering ,and fasted the whole day. The shades of night fell. He had paid his usual visit to the Lord's House ,whence he returned and fell asleep,reciting the Sacred Collect. Some hours later , the priests were placing before Sri Ranganatha the midnight offering and the usual blare of trumpets announced it to the expectant worshippers. Andal , the wife of Alwan ,heard it too ,and glancing at her lord who was sleeping peacefully ,said to herself:-

'Verily , my Lord Ranganatha,you are having a nice time of it.while your servant and devotee has to sleep fasting.Of course , y o u need not go for alms ,and no one dare interfere with y o u r hours of dinner or supper.'

She spoke out of a heavy heart , for ,what was Sri ~~Ranganatha~~ Ranganatha or Sri anybody to her ,above her husband and lord ? To her h e was the perfect man ,her refuge , her support ,her God of gods, her Guru here and hereafter for all eternity ;and what sort of a master was he serving who allowed his devoted servant to go without the barest means of sustenance - a thing which the very owners of cattle do not deny to their dumb slaves ? S h e was right , and Lord Ranganatha thought with her.

He appeared to Uttama Nambi (the master of the temple kitchen) in his sleep ,and said:-' My friend , Alwan sleeps fasting. Go and take this supper that has been served He just now and carry it to him on your head with all the marks of honour due to Me on such occasions.'

Alwan was roused from his sleep by the noise of the temple music and hastened out to worship the Lord who ,he thought , was coming in procession.Curiously enough ,it w a s a procession ,but he could see no image of the Lord therein;and to his wonder and great surprise, it stopped right at his door.He saw Uttama Nambi come towards him with something on his head and say,' The Lord has sent you this offering in the night; be pleased to accept it.'

Alwan would make nothing of it .' I never asked Him for this',he muttered to himself.'He has given me everything I wanted - even when I first took refuge with Him/' and I have nothing else to desire.So this is something new ,and I believe I shall have to pay for it.'

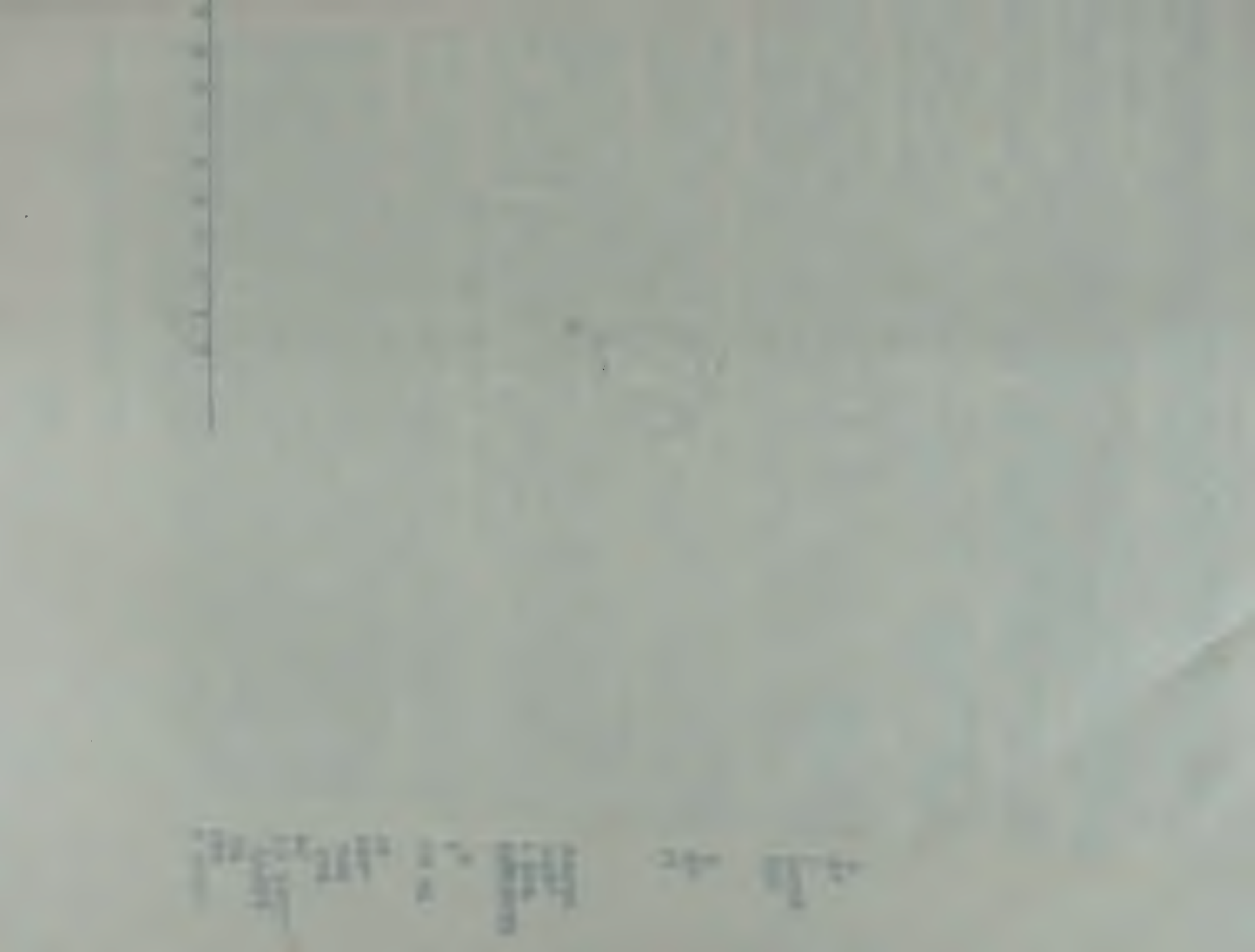
He took just that was wanted for himself and his wife , and sent away the rest with humble thanks.Then ,turning to his wife, he said ,' What was it that you asked of the Lord ?'

'Nothing ; I simply said to myself : There is the three of the trumpets announcing the Lord's offering .The servant is sleeping weary and fasting ,and the master steps gaily and in great pomp.'

'You fool !' cried Alwan , ' and you dared say this to my Master !'

'Your Master he may be ; but he is no master of mine. My master is love , my lord ,my life , my all. When he is lying asleep ,fasting ,what do I care for any otherGod or man ?'

A N A N T A C H A R Y A



A n a n t a c h a r y a

One day , Anantacharya , otherwise know as Anantalwan,who was one of the favourtite disciples of Bhagavan Ramanuja ,was digging at the tank he had constructed at Tirupati ,and made his wife who was big with child at the time , carry away the earth on her head. The Lord Venkatesa was pained to the heart at this unfeeling act as he thought; so he met her half-way disguised as one of her husband's disciples and relieved her of her load as if by her husband's orders. It surprised Ananta to see her return so quicaly every time;so he watched her from adistance and pounced upon the same audacious boy." You mischievous imp ! How dare you come between me and the service of the Lord ? I shall make your back smart nicely for this !" and he rushed at him with his spade uplifted.The offender dropped the basket and ran away with all speed; and Ananta who followed close upon his heels saw with amazement and awe that he disappeared within the temple.

Anantalwan's entire submission to the Divine Will

One day ,Anantalwan was in the garden gathering flowers for the garland he daily laid at the feet of the Lord,when a snake bit him severely in the hand. He quietly bathed in the sacred tank and went back to his work.A friend of his happened to notice this and said ,"What carelessness ! Allow me to get you medical assitance in time ."

"Ho ,ho " ,laughed Ananta ," here is a mighty uproar about a trifle.If the biter proved stronger , I should but bathe in the waters of theholy Viraja and stand before the Lord of Vaikuntha ; if the bitten one proved to be tough ,I should bathe in the sacred tank on the Holy Mount and stand before the Lord Venkatesa !"

One day ,Anantalwan was preparing the garland for the Lord, when Venkatesa ordered his attendance before HIM ,Ananta pretended not to hear; and when the garland was ready ,proceeded quietly to the shrine. "Well ,Ananta ,"said the Lord in tones of evident displeasure ,"so you would not come when I called for you ? Am I nothing in your eyes ?"

" I do not know that" ,replied Ananta ,not a whit taken aback ," I only know that when engaged in the service of the Lord or of His servants ,I have no eyes nor ears for anything else."

Verily this was cool enough ,but the Lord would not stop here; HE would tempt Ananta further .

" What ,even for ME ?"

"Well ,did I make any exception ?"

This was worse; and strange enough ,the Lord was more mystified than offended at this evident snubbing administered to Him;He had a vague presentment that Ananta would come out right in the end with some unanswerable reason.So He decided to see the matter out and said;'

" Now ,if I ask you to go away from here ,what would become of the boasted service you lay so great a store by ? "

"Ah ,my Lord ,"rejoined Ananta in slow thoughtful accents, there is the hitch.Since you would have me speak out ,here goes: I pin my faith to the words of the Holy Saint (Nammalvar);if they go for anything ,it would seem , y o u are the late comer.The hill and the shrine belong of right to the servants of the Lord.Y o u but came here a day before myself; both of us are here by the kind persission of the spirit of the Holy Mount (Adisesha manifests Himself as the Holy Mount).And when HE

asks me to quit (I have done nothing to deserve it) ,well , I shall think about it.Meanwhile let us talk of something else more probable and profitable."

Such was the fearless and heroic spirit of the disciples of Bhagavan Ramanuja that made them place service to Humanity even above the LORD HIMSELF ,and such was their unparalleled devotion to it.

While on a journey to his native parts , Vanta halted near a watercourse to partake of the food that he had brought with him from Tirupati ,and found to his amazement that it was wholly covered with ants.He was seized with a great fear and ~~xxx~~ turning to his disciples said ," These be those about whom the Holy Saint (Kulasekhara Alvar) sang:' May I be born on the Holy Mount as any insect , however insignificant !'- Convey them all back carefully and reverently to where they were .It was not given to me to be born within the sacred precincts of the Holy Mount . Why should I offend these who can claim that envied distinction ?"

RAMANUJA

and the

PARIAH WOMAN .

Ramanuja and the Pariah Woman

Once ,Bhagavan Ramanuja visited Tiruvali-Tirunagari and was ~~~~ making the round of the sacred shrines about it , when he saw a Pariah Woman coming towards him."Stand aside ,good woman ,until I pass on ", called out Bhagavan Ramanuja to her; but she ,unheeding , moved not an inch and said,' Aside ! Which side ? Towards you , the holiest of Brahmanas ? Towards the sacred shrine of Tirukkannapuram behind me ? To theright , towards the Tirumanan Kollai where Parakala waylaid the Lord; or towards the Pipal tree used by him as a watch-tower ? Towards my left , where rests the Lord of Tiruvali ? Which way , Soul of Purity , shall I turn ?"

Ramanuja had caught a Tartar and no soft one. "A thousand pardons ,noble lady , " ,exclaimed Ramanuja with sad humility."Length of years and shallow pedantry have but intensified that haughty Pride of mine and cast a thicker veil over my eyes ,which denies me even the sweet privilege of recognizing the Lord's Elect. These Sacred Badges would become you better than this proud idiot of a Sannyasin."

And he asked her to grace the Vaishnava fold with her noble presence and take her legitimate place near the Lord in the temple ,where we can see her even unto this day .